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->From the Editor's Keyboard              "Saying it like it is!"
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Well, I'm getting over this nasty cold, finally. This tropical weather that we're experiencing isn't helping the effort, but I'll survive.

The other storm, that we're all experiencing at the moment, is the one dealing with our economics. I said it last week, and will repeat myself this week - I'm no economist. But a $700 billion bailout plan, with no oversight and protection, doesn't seem to make any sense. When someone tells me to sign a contract without reading it because it's just a bunch of legalese, I make damn sure I read it or take it to someone who can translate! It's always the "small print" that gets ya!

I know that Joe has made a number of good observations about this same topic, so I'm not going to repeat them here. But I do want to emphasize that whatever final decision is made, it should be something that's going to help mainstream America. Additionally, something needs to be done to make sure that this predicament does not remain unchecked in the future! We'll see.

Until next time...


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                        PEOPLE ARE TALKING
                      compiled by Joe Mirando
                         joe@atarinews.org
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Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Again, there aren't enough messages to make a good column, but I want to hem and haw about politics for a bit...

Well, I hate to say I told you so... but I did.

The U.S. Senate is now running around like a bunch of hamsters on an exercise wheel, trying to get some progress made on this bill to bail out the finance industry. The problem is, and you'll know what I'm talking about if you've ever had more than one hamster at the same time, they're all running in different directions, causing that wheel

to move not at all.

Well, on the one hand, we've got the President yelling, "Just sign the bill! Don't bother to read it... sign it now! Don't wait for the translation!"

It's easy to see why he wanted his version passed through so quickly.. no controls, no oversight, no answerability of the principals and no caps on big-wig bonuses and golden parachutes.

On the other hand, you've got the Senate republicans saying, "Hey, we don't want the American people paying for this bailout! Get independent companies to buy the debt."

Sure. They want their buddies on 'the outside' to be able to buy up the 'profitable debt', leaving the 'deadweight' to foul the rest of the finance industry. Even with oversight and salary caps, lenders would still be free to make money on the backs of their customers, either by continuing to whack them with high interest rates or ARM/variable rate monstrosities, or by charging them filing fees for re-applying for a different rate or mortgage type. Either way, it's a money-making industry, and they'd just find another 'creative' option to drain money from the populace and still try to present themselves as the injured parties.

And the democrats (my guys) are talking about a committee this and an overseer that and a commission the other. Well, that may look good when you're running for re-election, but the fact is that all that stuff is a sure way to inflate the cost to the end user... you and me.

What they should do, in my opinion, is to form a 3-person committee, which shall be each individually compensated no more than the lowest-paid federal employee of any kind, which will see to the dissolution of any bank or other financial institution that suffers financial hardship due to defaults on mortgages made to individuals that, due to the nature of the mortgage itself, are in danger of losing their property.

Assets (both financial and 'real'... sell the computers and desks and mens' room fixtures too) of these institutions would be sold at auction to interested parties and the proceeds from said auctions would be used to compensate homeowners who were 'victimized' by what some are calling "predatory lending practices".

As for those 'poor souls' who 'fell victim' to the big bad banking industry, they deserve far worse than my plan affords them, if for no reason other than that they were looking to get something for nothing. They thought they'd found a secret loophole that no one else, in the five thousand year history of borrowing, lending and usury, had ever found. Well, they've got a lesson to learn too, and if it weren't for the fact that they're the lynchpin to getting the economy back on its feet, I'd say "let 'em swing with the rest of 'em". But the fact is that if the majority of the people with these 'wonderloans' take a hit, we're all going to take a hit.

So the money I mentioned before... the money from auctioning off the assets of the lending institutions that couldn't survive... would go into a fund to provide resources for individuals to pay for the re-processing fees for new loans and mortgages and for penalties on missed payments and other such charges. And just so there's no free

lunch, money toward penalties would be a flat 50% of the amount of the penalty incurred.

These fees would not go to the lending institutions, however. The lending institution would have to match the fee and forward both to a fund for erasing the bad debt accumulated by the combination of stupid people and greedy institutions.

Now here's, as a favorite high school teacher use to put it, the beauty part: The borrower would be able to shop around to get the best rate! Just because he/she got their original mortgage at ABC Banking doesn't mean they couldn't go to XYZ Building & Loan for the new mortgage. Lenders would have to compete (yes, competition is good) would allow borrowers to make their best deal. And to prevent anyone from 'getting creative' again, everything would have to be submitted by the lender to a newly established office within the treasury department that would do nothing but distribute the funds we just finished talking about. A very simple computer spreadsheet "Mortgage Calculator" could be used... much like what mortgage advisors have been using for years... to decide if a mortgage and the associated hand-out were appropriate, so that we can avoid problems like this in the future. New mortgages and old mortgages not deemed to be predatory would not qualify, and you could only take this merry-go-round ride once. In that way, this newly created office would close itself down and, since the three-member committee is a low-paying proposition in the first place, there wouldn't be much incentive to keep the whole thing going after the crisis was over. It might well be the first time in U.S. history that a government agency/office closed itself down without an argument from anyone!

It's important, at this point, to say that no money would actually change hands... everything would be done via electronic transfer, and a borrower could not take the money intended as recompense for a 'creative' mortgage and use it to buy a speedboat or even a big, tricked-out nametag... it would be for the mortgage situation, and the mortgage situation only.

Get these people into the homes they deserve, with 'deserve' being the operative word. We need to do that without allowing the fat-cats to make an unholy killing, without rewarding companies and institutions for abusing their customers, and without coddling those customers for being taken in in the first place.

Now, I'm sure that many of you are scratching your heads and saying, "That'll never work because...", and you're right. There are a lot of things that need to be taken into account, and a lot of people are going to complain about different parts of it.

But here's the thing... I came up with this in about an hour. I'm not an economist or a banker. I'm a guy with a mortgage and a 1040 for the IRS every year.

If I can come up with this, alone and in 60 minutes, shouldn't our leaders, a hundred (well, let's leave Obama and McCain out of it for now, so 98) Senators be able to come up with something that won't screw the poor working family or the institutions that WEREN'T sticking it to those families? Shouldn't our president be able to give us something better than "Sign it NOW or we all die!"?

Of course, none of that will ever happen. We'll get a bill with sweet spots for the banking industry, for the housing industry, for the CEOs,

and probably for the oil companies somehow or other. The stock market won't crash like it did in '29. 'They' won't let it. They have too much to lose. What will happen is that it'll be tougher for the rest of us to make ends meet while still paying them their 'due'.

The best defense for people like you and me is to remember what your grandmother or your father or your great-uncle Hank told you... there's no such thing as a free lunch.

Well, that's it for this week. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Xbox Live To Have Maintenance!
  """""""""""""""""""""""""""""""   Nintendo Icons, Time To Shine!
                                     'de Blob' Is Fun!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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                Microsoft to Take Xbox Live Down for Maintenance

We hope you didn't have any big Xbox Live plans on Monday, September 29, because Microsoft's Larry "Major Nelson" Hryb has posted a notice that the online service will be down for maintenance, potentially lasting all day.

"On Monday, 9/29/2008 from 12:01 AM PST for up to 24 hours, Xbox Live will be offline for maintenance," Hryb writes. In addition to Xbox Live being down, you won't be able to access the "My Xbox" section of Xbox.com, and the Xbox forums will be in read-only mode. Do note that this downtime will not result in any new features once Live goes back up - it's only intended to prepare the service for the big Xbox Dashboard re-launch set to happen later this year, that'll add new navigation features and as well the Microsoft Avatars.

And while Xbox Live is down, here are a few friendly recommendations on how to spend your day: go for a jog; learn a new hobby (like, say, whittling); bake delicious cookies; or, you know, just play all the games you were planning on playing anyway, just offline.

Fan-Favorite Nintendo Characters Wario and Kirby Get Some Time to Shine

Monday, two popular Nintendo characters launch their new video games on a rare dual-launch day. Conniving Wario appears in Wario Land: Shake It! for the Wii console, while super tuff pink puff Kirby arrives in Kirby Super Star Ultra for Nintendo DS. Both characters have millions of fans, and each game plays to the strengths of its lead character.

Wario Land Shake It! looks like a hand-drawn cartoon that players can control. It's a classic-style side-scrolling game in which players navigate Wario through a series of enemies and hazards. The game features motion controls: Players shake the Wii Remote controller to help Wario shake down his enemies, free coins from treasure bags and even cause earthquakes. Wario's narcissistic personality is on full display as he sets out to get his hands on the Bottomless Coin Sack.

What Wario is to greed, Kirby is to kindness. But the little pink powerhouse is not to be trifled with. Fans know that Kirby has the ability to inhale enemies and copy their abilities, a trait used to progress through the game and defeat anyone who gets in the way. Kirby Super Star Ultra for the Nintendo DS updates the beloved Super NES classic including new graphics, new adventures and new challenges. In local wireless mode, up to four Nintendo DS owners can compete, even if they only have one game card.

"Nintendo has one of the largest stables of beloved video game characters on the planet," said Cammie Dunaway, Nintendo of America's executive vice president of Sales & Marketing. "Kirby and Wario's new games will give veteran players challenges to enjoy while introducing novice players to these iconic video game personalities."

'de Blob' Is Fun, Visually Stunning

After immersing myself in the colorful world of THQ's "de Blob" for many hours, I was quickly able to come to two conclusions about this new Wii platform game.

First, "de Blob" ($49.99) is without a doubt the best painting-themed video game since the obscure '80s arcade title "Make Trax," aka "Crush Roller." And second, this is clearly one of the most engaging, creative third-party Wii games to date.

"de Blob," based on a free PC game developed by Dutch students, rides a classic good-versus-evil theme. The empiresque I.N.K.T. Corporation has sucked all the color out of the formerly spectral Chroma City, leaving its residents in a monochrome funk.

As de Blob, your mission is to soak up paint and roll, bounce and flip around the city to free its buildings, streets and enslaved brethren from a black-and-white eternity.

You control your gelatinous character's movement using the nunchuk's control stick while swatting the Wii remote to attack Inky soldiers, open gates and load up on confiscated color from Paintbots.

Help comes from four fellow revolutionaries who teach various maneuvers,

tricks and attacks while offering mini-challenges that must be completed
to advance to subsequent levels.

It's a simple concept, but "de Blob" comes to life in the way each level
of Chroma City's expansive landscape is revealed. Untouched sections
that first appear as blank color-by-number sheets burst into a rainbow
of hues as your character explores, much like the sepia-to-Technicolor
transition in "The Wizard of Oz."

Your race against time is aided by several pickups, which include clock
bonuses, extra lives and tankers that provide temporary invincibility
and unlimited paint. Styles let de Blob paint in various graffiti-styled
patterns, and jumping on a transform engine immediately provides color
to the surrounding landscape.

There are also several hazards to avoid, such as hot plates, spikes and
electricity. When de Blob stumbles into a blank ink puddle, he must find
his way to water and dive in to save himself from oblivion. That same
water can also be a hazard when de Blob is happily painting away, as it
removes all his paint.

Cut scenes do a great job telling a creative story, and the action is
just as smooth and engaging as the cinematics.

The game doesn't come anywhere near tapping the motion capability of the
Wii remote, but that's not a huge issue here.

The visuals are stunning, and "de Blob" is simply a fun game to play.

Three and a half out of four stars.

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                       A-ONE's Headline News
                  The Latest in Computer Technology News
                     Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

             FBI Searches Apartment of Alleged Palin Hacker

Federal authorities are ramping up an investigation of a 20-year-old
college student for allegedly hacking into Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin's
e-mail account.

The FBI searched the apartment of alleged hacker David Kernell on Sunday
morning, and three of Kernell's roommates could testify this week about
the case before a grand jury in Chattanooga, according to local news
reports.

After it was discovered that the Republican vice presidential
candidate's personal Yahoo e-mail account was hacked into, reports began
circulating that the hack could be traced back to Kernell, a University
of Tennessee student and son of Democratic Tennessee state
representative Mike Kernell.

Witnesses told a local television station that the FBI served a search
warrant at Kernell's Knoxville, Tenn., apartment early Sunday morning,
interrupting a party, and spent more than an hour taking pictures of the
apartment. Kernell's three roommates were subpoenaed to testify this
week, a witness also said.

The hacker gained access to Palin's account by guessing certain personal
details about the governor's life and then resetting her password to
"popcorn." ZIP files with content from Palin's account were posted on
the Internet.

Laura Sweeney, a Justice Department public-affairs specialist, confirmed
that there was investigatory activity relating to the Palin hack in
Knoxville over the weekend but said no criminal charges have been filed
against anyone.

IBM To Shun 'Rogue' Standards Bodies

IBM thinks it's time to clean up standards bodies.

The computing giant on Tuesday said that it will review its membership
in existing standards bodies and withdraw from those that are not
sufficiently transparent in their processes and intellectual property
practices.

IBM convened a group of experts this summer to diagnose problems in the
"standards community." It published the group's findings on Tuesday.

Participating in standards bodies is fraught with uncertainty and
unpredictability, an IBM representative said on Tuesday. Because of "bad
behavior" among participants, there is a risk that developing countries
will shun existing groups and create their own product standards, he said.

Product incompatibilities are fairly common, such as competing formats
for high-definition DVDs. But standards are becoming increasingly
important, touching the health care, public safety, and industrial
sectors of the economy, IBM said.

Standards Ecma International was harshly criticized by IBM and other
companies earlier this year for its role in standardizing Office Open
XML, Microsoft Office-derived file formats.

Microsoft succeeded in having Open XML standardized by Ecma
International and then the ISO (International Organization for
Standardization). It was an effort to appeal to governments and large
business customers concerned with long-term document retention.

There was active lobbying on both sides of the debate in the run-up to
the vote with a number of national standards bodies complaining that the
specification was not appropriately vetted.

No employees of Microsoft appear to have participated in the IBM-led
standards process review.

In the past, IBM, too, has been accused of choosing standards bodies to
further its commercial purposes. There have been a number of instances

where rival vendors developed essentially the same technology and then submitted redundant specifications to standards groups.

In the case of Web services specifications earlier this decade, IBM and Microsoft executives sketched out a wide range of interoperability standards that were further developed in a standards body - a process that many competitors complained was not sufficiently open. IBM's representative said that Big Blue's review of its standards membership and procedures is not linked to a specific instances, like Open XML's certification. Rather, it's part of a more fundamental review of standard body behavior which it is committing to, with the hope that other companies will do as well. The IBM representative said that it's "quite possible" that the company will withdraw from some standards bodies. IBM singled out the World Wide Web Consortium as a group with good procedures. The tenets of its standards policy are these:

* Begin or end participation in standards bodies based on the quality and openness of their processes, membership rules, and intellectual property policies.

* Encourage emerging and developed economies to both adopt open global standards and to participate in the creation of those standards.

* Advance governance rules within standards bodies that ensure technology decisions, votes, and dispute resolutions are made fairly by independent participants, protected from undue influence.

* Collaborate with standards bodies and developer communities to ensure that open software interoperability standards are freely available and implementable.

* Help drive the creation of clear, simple and consistent intellectual property policies for standards organizations, thereby enabling standards developers and implementers to make informed technical and business decisions.

Top ISPs Deny Watching You Online

Three top Internet service providers on Thursday denied using online behavioral advertising and called on all Internet companies to adhere to standards that require customers to opt in to the tracking of their online activities.

AT&T, Time Warner Cable, and Verizon denied keeping tabs on customers' Internet activity in order to service up more targeted online ads, but reserved the right to do so in the future.

"AT&T does not today engage in online behavioral advertising, but we understand the uniquely sensitive nature of this practice," Dorothy Attwood, senior vice president of public policy and chief privacy officer at AT&T, told the Senate Commerce Committee.

Attwood said that AT&T would not use customer information for targeted ads "without an affirmative, advance action by the consumer that is based on a clear explanation of how the consumer's action will affect the use of her information."

Peter Stern, chief strategy officer for Time Warner Cable, took a similar stance.

"Presently, Time Warner Cable does not engage in targeted Internet advertising as an ISP or as a Web site operator," Stern said. "Should Time Warner Cable decide to engage in such activities, our customers' privacy will be a fundamental consideration."

"Any technology that is used to track and collect consumer online behavior for the purposes of targeted advertising - regardless of which company is doing the collecting - should only be used with the customer's knowledge and consent," said Tom Tauke, executive vice president of public affairs, policy, and communications at Verizon.

Internet companies typically collect user data such as IP address, location, and browser. Most insist that this type of information is non-identifying and that search data is anonymized after a certain period of time, but the technology exists to take it one step further and serve up targeted ads based on Internet activity.

Does your search history show that you were looking for a new DVD player? Why not display an ad for Best Buy DVD player deals? Seems easy enough, but most users do not even realize this is going on; companies typically require users to opt out if they object, rather than opt in before the practice begins.

The issue picked up steam this summer after Rep. Edward Markey, a Massachusetts Democrat and chairman of the House Energy and Commerce subcommittee on telecom and the Internet, led the charge to require an opt-in behavioral advertising policy.

He called on 33 companies - including AT&T, Time Warner, and Verizon - to provide details about their online ad practices, most of whom denied invasive practices.

Markey also targeted NebuAd, which takes customer information from ISPs and helps them serve up more targeted ads. After several bruising hearings on Capitol Hill, NebuAd chief executive Bob Dykes resigned earlier this month, and the company scaled back its online ad business.

This type of scrutiny has prompted some companies to back off their behavioral advertising plans, according to Tauke.

"There's a lot to be said for shining the light of day on a lot of practices," Tauke said. "People stopped their behavior; that's what an industry group can do.

Verizon is currently working with industry insiders to establish best practices, Tauke said. Participants have signed non-disclosure agreements, so Tauke said he was not at liberty to disclose their identities, but "it is fair to say that there are ISPs, and representatives of other online types of activities."

Tauke said he hopes the group will be able to produce something by year's end.

All three companies stressed that legislation should be a last resort and that it should not be technology-specific. If truly necessary, a bill should involve all facets of online advertising - ad networks, publishers, search engines, ISPs, browser developers, and other

application providers, representatives said.

"A framework that leaves any provider uncovered would leave all users unprotected," Stern said.

Gigi Sohn, president and co-founder of interest group Public Knowledge, said that under the Communications Act, cable Internet providers like Time Warner are covered by stricter privacy regulations than broadband telephone ISPs like Verizon and AT&T. If anything, Sohn said, lawmakers should amend the act "to fix those gaps."

"If you could take on the Communication Act and level the playing field, we'd applaud that heartily," Tauke said. But he acknowledged that "re-writing that act would be a very long process and very hard to get anything to fruition."

At this point, it might be most prudent to leave it to the industry and the Federal Trade Commission, which has developed behavioral advertising guidelines of its own, according to Tauke.

Also on Thursday, Consumers Union released a study that said 72 percent of Americans are concerned that their online behaviors were being tracked and profiled by companies.

Yahoo Board Approves AOL Talks

Yahoo's shiny new board has decided to move forward with talks with Time Warner about the future of its AOL division, according to the Financial Times.

Citing an unnamed source familiar with the company, the report says active negotiations are not taking place yet - just that Yahoo could sit down to the table over the matter.

Time Warner CEO Jeff Bewkes confirmed last month that the company will split up AOL's media and Internet access groups. And there has been wide speculation that the company may just ditch the ailing business unit altogether.

Earlier this year, talks between Yahoo and Time Warner heated up as Yahoo looked for ways to thwart Microsoft's unsolicited takeover bid. At that time, reports suggested that Yahoo might buy AOL or that Time Warner might invest in Yahoo.

The decision came at Yahoo's first board meeting since Carl Icahn and a few of his posse took seats at the board table.

Dell Shifting All Laptops to LED Backlights

Dell plans to transition all of its new laptop displays to energy-saving light-emitting diode backlights by 2010, the PC giant said Wednesday. LED-lit desktop monitors will arrive in the near future, executives said.

By Dec. 15, two-thirds of Dell's Latitude E-series laptops will be

shipped with mercury-free LED backlighting as a standard feature, including the Latitude E4200, E4300, E6400, E6400 ATG and E6500, as well as the Dell Precision M2400 and M4400 mobile workstations.

By the end of 2009, 80 percent of all of Dell's laptops, both new and existing models, will include the LED backlights. The transition to LED backlights will be completed by 2010, Dell said.

"Why did we do this? We have been listening to our customers in order to extract customer value, and LED helps to move that agenda along," said Michael Murphy, Dell's senior manager of worldwide environmental affairs, in an interview.

Dell said its 15-inch LED displays consume an average of 43 percent less power at maximum brightness, saving approximately $20 million and 220 million kilowatt-hours in 2010 and 2011 combined. Dell has made a concerted effort to "green" both its computers and operations, launching an energy-efficient Dell Studio Hybrid designed to consume much less power than traditional desktops. In August, Dell said it achieved its plan to become carbon-neutral.

From an environmental standpoint, recyclers have balked at processing the small amount of mercury found in the CCFL backlights behind standard LCD displays, Murphy said. Now, Dell can market a totally mercury-free laptop, he said.

But the addition of LED backlights also benefits customers, beyond giving them the warm feeling that they're saving the planet.

LED displays also extend battery life: the reduction in power LED backlighting brings can help push a notebook's battery life from an average of 3 to 3.5 hours to something closer to 6 hours, Murphy said. Choosing HP's Illumi-Lite LED display when configuring its new EliteBook 6930p notebook has also helped push its rated battery life up to about 24 hours.

Moreover, shifting away from CCFL backlights allows for thinner panels, making the notebook lighter for the consumer, and saving Dell money when transporting hundreds of thousands of units.

Officially, Dell did not say whether or not it planned to shift its desktop monitor line over to LED backlighting, however. In the past, Dell has asked third-party monitor manufacturers or ODMs to build the Dell-branded monitors themselves. Rivals like Lenovo have recently announced the ThinkVision L2440x Wide monitor, a 24-inch low-halogen, mercury and arsenic-free display which uses efficient white LED backlighting and consumes only 29 watts, making it Energy Star 4.1 qualified.

A shift to LED backlighting in Dell's desktop monitors is not far off, however. "We are absolutely committed to driving LED technology in both the notebook and desktop space," Dell's Murphy said. "I would call the notebook transition phase one."

"We will have LED optimized desktop displays in the not-too-distant future," Murphy said. The company is working with its broad base of suppliers to enable the shift, he said.

Microsoft Confirms Windows 7 Pre-Beta Launch

Microsoft has confirmed it will release the first pre-beta version of Windows 7 to developers next month. Windows 7 is the next major version of the Windows client operating system.

Developers will get their first look at an alpha version of the operating system at the Professional Developers Conference (PDC) in October. Microsoft plans to demonstrate its progress on Windows 7 at the annual event. But the operating system itself won't debut in retail stores until 2010.

"With Windows 7 at PDC2008, you will see advances across the full range of Windows - including the kernel, networking, hardware and devices, and user interface," wrote Denise Begley, a marketing manager for Microsoft, on the company blog. "Additionally, attendees will have the opportunity to attend 21 different sessions that drill down into the details of developing for Windows 7."

The fact that Microsoft is putting a pre-beta into developers' hands signals that Redmond is on track for its 2010 Windows 7 release, according to Charles King, principal analyst at Pund-IT.

"Microsoft is going to be using the same kernel as Vista, which is a very wise decision. Deciding to rewrite the kernel for Vista was one of the issues that reportedly delayed that project significantly," King said. "Trying to start all over with a brand-new kernel for Windows 7 would not have been a great idea."

What's more, analysts said working with the Vista kernel should avoid most, if not all, the compatibility problems Vista users experienced out of the box. Even if Windows 7 doesn't wow consumers and businesses, King said, it will nonetheless be far more stable and cause far fewer problems with users than Vista initially did.

"Innovation is great, but a seamless user experience is very important, too, and maybe more important," King said. "Vista demonstrated that even when you try to do everything right, things can go very, very badly. Microsoft is doing everything it can to make sure the user and developer experience with Windows 7 is light-years ahead of what it was with Vista."

Microsoft's last public demonstration, which took place in May at the D: All Things Digital conference, raised more questions than answers. Windows 7 will tout multi-touch technology that lets fingers draw rudimentary images. The first demo also included navigating an online map to find a nearby Starbucks. Microsoft figures the technology is a natural for image editing and navigation.

But analysts were critical, saying the demo was short, and the company failed to address questions about the underlying technology in Windows 7. Still, Microsoft is touting the possibilities of touchscreen technology on a PC.

The May showing saw demonstrations that included the ability to slide your finger along the screen to navigate. To zoom in, you simply spread your fingers. A video of the demonstration showed a piano keyboard being played by touching the keys on-screen, suggesting new possibilities for digital-music applications.

uTorrent for Mac Leaked

A pre-release alpha version of a Mac version of uTorrent, the popular
BitTorrent client for Windows, has been leaked to the public.

Available from the Swedish torrent Web site The Pirate Bay, the
Cocoa-based client has been expected since 2006 when BitTorrent, Inc.,
bought uTorrent and promised to develop a Mac version. There was little
said since then, until this past August when uTorrent developer Greg
Hazel announced that a Mac version would be ready ''in a few weeks,''
according to the torrent news Web site TorrentFreak.

Simon Morris, BitTorrent's VP of Product Development, responded to the
leak by saying that the version currently in the wild was not supposed
to get out and is not recommended for use, although he hopes that people
now believe him when he says that there is a Mac uTorrent client in the
works. There is an official notification list for eager users available
at the uTorrent site. http://mac.utorrent.com/

Certain key features don't work yet, such as searching. Comments about
the app on The Pirate Bay confirm its bugginess. So far it only seems to
work on Intel-based Macs, and only those running OS X 10.5 or higher.
Because this is an extremely early build of the client, it's not clear
at this point how it will stand up to established Mac torrent clients
such as Transmission, how it compares to its Windows sibling, or even if
this means that a BitTorrent-branded Mac client is in the works.

Ironically, you'll need a torrent client to download this torrent
client, since it's only available from a torrent Web site.

Congress Sending Child Porno Bills to President

Congress is sending President Bush several bills that would tighten laws
on child pornographers' use of the Internet.

The House on Friday passed by 418-0 a measure clarifying that images
obtained over the Internet were subject to federal interstate commerce
laws. The bill was in response to a federal court ruling that
prosecutors must show that images kept on a computer had crossed state
lines.

"This legislation closes the jurisdictional loophole that allowed a
guilty man to escape punishment," said Rep. Nancy Boyda, D-Kan., the
bill's sponsor.

The same legislation contained another bill sponsored by Rep.
Christopher Carney, D-Pa., that would allow prosecutors to include money
laundering as a tool in child pornography cases. That would fix another
loophole that has allowed Internet users to evade child pornography laws
by not downloading or saving the images.

The House was also scheduled to take up legislation, passed by the
Senate on Thursday, that would require more electronic service providers

to report online child pornography and make failure to report known child pornography a federal crime.

Currently, Internet service providers are required to report child pornography to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. The legislation, sponsored by Sens. Charles Schumer, D-N.Y., and Joe Biden, D-Del., would expand those companies with reporting obligations to include search engines such as Google and Yahoo!, social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace, domain name registrars and wireless phone carriers.

These companies would not be required to monitor Web sites, but the legislation would triple fines for knowing failure to report child pornography. The companies would also receive limited protection from prosecution for transmitting images of apparent child pornography to the National Center to ensure they do not underreport child pornography for fear of prosecution.

Recycler, Tech Companies Step Up E-waste Standards

Neither Congress nor the Bush administration is moving quickly to adopt international electronic-waste standards, but some technology companies are.

Both Sony and LG Electronics have partnerships with Waste Management Recycle America, the largest residential recycler in the U.S., letting consumers drop off for free their old Sony, LG, Zenith, and GoldStar products at designated recycling centers. Now consumers making use of the service can be assured their e-waste is being handled according to the guidelines in the Basel Convention, an international treaty that sets standards for transboundary hazardous waste disposal.

WM Recycle America announced Wednesday it is committing to the Basel Action Network e-Stewards Pledge. Along with committing signatories to the statutes of the Basel Convention about exporting e-waste, the pledge also requires organizations to prevent hazardous e-waste from entering municipal incinerators or landfills.

The United States is the only developed nation that has not ratified the Basel convention. The Government Accountability Office told Congress last week that should be remedied, so that recycling companies stop sending hazardous e-waste to developing countries.

"Consumers need to know who are the legitimate recyclers that will not simply take their money and ship their old electronic materials for processing in developing countries or dispose of them in a landfill," said Sarah Westervelt of the Basel Action Network.

BYOC: Company Gives Workers Unusual Laptop Leeway

In a nod to how finicky people have become about the gadgets they use, software company Citrix Systems Inc. is rolling out a new program for its workers: BYOC - Bring Your Own Computer.

Employees get a $2,100 stipend to buy a laptop and three-year service plan. In exchange for getting a computer with the specs they want - whether it's a wide screen, a light weight or ultra-fast processing - the workers essentially take on the company's technology purchasing and maintenance responsibilities. The 200 staffers who have signed up since the pilot program began this month say it's a deal they're happy to take.

Carolyn VanVurst, a Citrix information technology specialist, said she loved the idea of having a single laptop for both personal and business use, since she's on the computer so much.

"It was easier for me to have my life on one device instead of separated," she said.

It appears Citrix is the first large company to take such a leap, at least publicly. Steve Kleynhans, an analyst at Gartner Inc., said other technology companies have started similar pilot programs but are doing so under the radar.

The idea presents technical challenges - such as making sure employees can access the programs they need for their jobs - as well as corporate policy questions, including how sensitive information is protected on the employees' computers.

"There's a lot of groundwork that needs to be done," Kleynhans said.

For Citrix, the program is a way of promoting its "virtualization" technology, which among other things lets companies run software programs they need - like SAP for time sheets and Microsoft Exchange for e-mail - in a central data center. Employees access the applications by logging in remotely, but the programs and potentially confidential information in them are never downloaded to the workers' own laptops.

Citrix's chief information officer, Paul Martine, said the company's leaders asked themselves: "Our technology does this - why aren't we doing this?"

"I'm either crazy," Martine added, "or this is going to be the trend of the future."

Whether other companies follow the bring-your-own-computer route is more likely to depend on whether it saves them any money. Citrix said it generally had been spending $2,500 to $2,600 to buy and manage a PC for each employee - a figure that analysts said likely is similar at other companies - so it comes out ahead with the $2,100 stipend.

Pund-IT analyst Charles King called it a "very forward-looking strategy."

"People tend to become very personally attached to their technology," King said. "Having the freedom to buy the kind of computer you want would be seen as a perk, and a happy employee is usually a productive one."

However, Sara Radicati, an analyst whose Radicati Group tracks business computing use, said she doesn't see what problem the Citrix program fixes, and she's unsure how useful it will be.

"We live in a complex world, so it is easier to manage and know where your data is and what is being done with company-sensitive information if you have a little more control," Radicati said.

Tim Bajarin, head of technology consulting group Creative Strategies, added that the BYOC plan is likely easier for a software company like Citrix. "They are a virtualization company so they understand how to make this work successfully," Bajarin said. "For a traditional IT shop ... this is very difficult to do."

There are some restrictions. Citrix is requiring that employees use either Windows or Mac operating systems, have antivirus software and buy a three-year, full-service warranty so that tech support from the manufacturer can be on hand within 24 hours and supply a loaner if needed.

The pilot period is expected to last until the end of the year. Martine will be looking to see whether the program is as self-service as hoped. He'll also be keeping an eye on whether staffers are leaving the company shortly after receiving the laptop stipend. If that happens, Citrix may prorate the stipend amount, as they do with relocation expenses in similar situations.

Lettie Carrisales, an information technology manager at Citrix participating in the pilot, said she's glad the company's computing purchases don't have to be "one-size-fits-all anymore." For example, she said, an engineer needs a faster, more robust machine than someone with more clerical duties. Carrisales is considering getting a Mac because it can run both its own operating system and Windows, and her customers use both.

Employees like VanVurst, who was enticed by having the same computer for office and personal use, might find that to be a trap, said Citrix software engineer Mark Beyer. People can find themselves doing more work from home, or more personal tasks while at work, he said.

"You've just got to monitor it," Beyer said. "It's still your decision whether to turn off the screen and play with your dog."

Work E-mail Use Creeps into Off Hours

Joe Soto, general manager of an advertising firm in Philadelphia, has a complicated relationship with his BlackBerry e-mail phone.

He felt "awful" and out of touch when he was without a BlackBerry for two days because his unit fell overboard when he was sailing on the Chesapeake.

At the same time, if he could turn back the clock five years, to before the BlackBerry took over corporate America, he would do it "in a minute."

"If everybody also threw their BlackBerrys away, I would too," he said, chuckling. "The only problem is, in my industry, it makes me more competitive."

A study published Wednesday by the Pew Internet and American Life Project shows that workers in general have mixed feelings about the increased use of e-mail and the Internet in the last few years.

In a survey of 2,134 adults in March and April, 96 percent used e-mail, the Internet or cell phones. Of them, 80 percent said these technologies have improved their ability to do their jobs, and 58 percent said these

tools have given them more control over when to work.

But 46 percent also said these devices increase the demands that they work more hours, and 49 percent said that the technologies make it harder to disconnect from work when they should be off.

Half of the respondents who were employed and had e-mail said they check their work e-mail on weekends, and a full 22 percent said they checked office e-mail "often" on the weekends, up from 16 percent who said the same thing in 2002.

Much of the increase can be attributed to increased use of wireless e-mail devices like the BlackBerry, made by Research in Motion Ltd. Of those who have such gadgets, 40 percent say they often check work e-mail on weekends. A quarter often check in even when on vacation.

"The scariest thing was when I was on vacation a couple of years ago, and my BlackBerry rang. I was in the middle of the Sahara Desert!" Soto said.

Checking work e-mail is considered much more important for people making more than $75,000 a year than it is for low earners, just as high earners are more likely to have longer hours. Also those who work for large corporations are much more likely to be checking their e-mail "constantly" at work, compared to those who work for smaller companies.

For workers in general, it's unclear whether e-mail alone is increasing the amount of work. Other studies show that people have worked roughly the same number of hours every week for the last two decades. In the Pew study, 17 percent said e-mail had increased their work hours, while 6 percent said the opposite - that e-mail reduced the time they had to work.

The survey was conducted by phone, and the respondents were called randomly. The margin of sampling error was plus or minus 4 percent.

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